

boom since World War II; and an unemployment rate that has stayed at or below 5 percent for more than 15 months. The current rate of 4.5 percent is just remarkable.

The crash of 2000 yielded to gains that have sent the Dow Jones Industrial average to an all-time high. We have created more than 7 million jobs since August 2003. These gains are no accident. They are the result of the stimulative tax relief we passed. These policies clearly worked, and they should be kept in place.

Republicans used the strong economic climate to cut the deficit. We cut it in half even more quickly than anyone thought we would. And working together, across the aisle, we must continue that trend and balance the budget within 5 years.

Another focus of this Congress is the overwhelmingly popular and effective prescription drug relief for seniors. President Bush and the Republican Congress gave seniors the Medicare prescription drug care benefit they had waited on for decades. We cannot "scrap" this program, as some would like. And we will oppose any effort to do so.

A spirit of cooperation will lead to a heightened respect for fairness—and ensure that the same number of judicial nominees that were confirmed in the final years of the last three administrations are confirmed in the last 2 years of this one.

Americans want judges to uphold the original intent of the Constitution, not rewrite it. Judicial activism has divided the courts, the Congress, and the Nation for too long. If our work of restoration and a new civility is to take hold, we must recommit ourselves to the ideal of judicial restraint.

Like the three Presidents before him, President Bush will spend his last 2 years in office with the opposition party in control of the Senate. Like them, he has a right to expect that his nominees will receive an up-or-down vote.

The voters recently sent us a message. They told us to solve the problems that face this Nation. They expect us to win the wars we wage. And they expect us to be men and women of principle.

The people of Kentucky gave me the great honor of my life when they first elected me to the Senate. And I have gone about my work here with them foremost in my mind.

I have fought hard to advance and protect the values that matter most to the people of my State.

It is because of another election that I stand here today. I am honored that my colleagues chose me to lead them at this important moment in our history. I take my duty seriously.

I am filled today with a sense of purpose—for party, yes, but for this institution and for our Nation first, for their renewal.

Elections are about ideas, and here are some I hold most dear.

I believe the state exists to serve individuals and families, not the other way around.

I believe everyone fortunate enough to call himself or herself an American should be able to pursue their dreams freely.

I believe God has blessed this country richly, and that the proper response to the gift of freedom is to defend it.

And I believe that the first duty of Government is the defense and protection of its citizens.

So I am eager to work with my colleagues to find bold solutions to big problems. Yet on some things I will not yield.

I will never agree to proposals that weaken the security of our citizens at home or the capabilities of our Armed Forces abroad.

I will never agree to a tax increase on working families or small businesses. Our economy is strong because of the hard work and enterprise of Americans. We will not undermine that spirit by taxing it.

I will never agree to retreat from our responsibility to confirm qualified judicial nominees.

Bipartisanship, cooperation and accomplishment; yes. Civility; yes. But we will remain true to our principles.

Henry Clay was a great Kentuckian. He spent the last 2 years of his life using the tools of the Senate to save his country. His devotion to the cause of national unity was so great that one rival called it "a crowning grace" to Clay's public life.

Clay shows us that divided government need not be divisive. Indeed, it often leads to historic agreements that unity governments have little incentive to achieve.

And so, working together, forgetting past grievances, forging new alliances, we can solve the difficult issues of the day. This is the purpose of the Senate and the privilege of its Members.

If our steps are guided by this simple principle, then this 110th Congress will have met its responsibility on behalf of all Americans, and strengthened this institution for the unseen challenges that will always lie ahead.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that the next 2 hours of morning business be controlled as follows: the first 60 minutes under the control of the majority, the second 60 minutes under the control of the minority, with Senators therein limited to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The assistant majority leader.

A NEW DIRECTION FOR AMERICA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is my honor to follow the speeches that have been given by my new majority leader,

Senator HARRY REID of Nevada, and my new Republican leader, Senator MITCH MCCONNELL of Kentucky. It is a great honor for me to stand this day in the Senate as the assistant Democratic leader. I cannot express my gratitude to my colleagues for entrusting me with this responsibility.

I come to this moment with a sense of amazement. Some 40 years ago, as a college student in this town, I first set foot in the old Senate office building as an intern, never dreaming that 40 years later I would be standing on the floor of the Senate in this capacity. It is indeed a great honor.

I do not know how many men and women have lived in the United States of America in our history—hundreds of millions, for sure. Today there are some 300 million who count America as their home. In the entire history of the United States of America, from its creation, as of today, as of this moment in our history, 1,895 men and women have had this high honor of serving in the Senate. Today, we were joined by 10 more.

Their life stories, like the stories of many of us, are the stories of America: stories of immigrant families, stories of struggle, stories of dreams that finally resulted in an election to this great body in the Senate.

I imagine if you called on some of the experts in U.S. history—even those who served for quite a few years in the Senate—and asked them how many of the 1,895 Senators who have served here they could remember, they would be hard pressed to come up with a long list. As it happens in most walks of life, a few people stand out in history. But most are part of a parade, a parade that passes by many times anonymously.

In the desk drawers of each of our desks here there is a quaint little Senate custom. I was talking to Senator John Glenn of Ohio about it today. Senators who have served here, despite what they were told by their teachers in grade school, are encouraged to scratch their names in the bottom of the desk drawer. I happen to be sitting at the desk of former Senator John Glenn of Ohio, and my former mentor and inspiration, Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois. I would imagine if you look in these desk drawers, there will be many names you do not recognize. The point I am trying to get to is this: Members of the Senate, men and women, come and go, but, thank God, this Nation endures. And it endures because of the sacrifice each makes for the common good of this Nation.

We have weathered so many storms—9/11 the most recent but, of course, the Civil War, which almost tore us apart—and time and again throughout our history men and women in this body, in the Senate, have decided the good of this Nation was more important than their individual personal ambition.

We have another similar moment in history. It is interesting how critical Americans are of their politicians; and

that is a healthy thing. We do not assume that those elected to public office are part of any gifted class or any special group. We just assume they are people who are like us and fortunate enough to get elected. But over the years a lot of people have questioned us, whether those of us who have devoted a good part of our lives to public service truly have the public interest in mind.

The skepticism grew last year with the culture of corruption, the announcements of indictments, prosecutions, resignations, not just among public officials but those who work in the Halls of the Capitol. And the skepticism and cynicism about public life grew as people heard more and more of these stories. That is why it is so important we reflect on what Senator REID said earlier about our agenda.

The first item on our agenda—and there could be many—is to address this issue of ethics and honesty in Government. I have been a fortunate soul in public life. Two people who brought me here—Paul Douglas and Paul Simon, both Senators—were literally paragons of public virtue.

Paul Douglas, as Senator from Illinois, used to have a tradition that except for food and drink he would not accept a gift worth more than \$2.50. Now, it sounds like an interesting standard. It turned out to be a complete headache to figure out what to do with a gift that was worth \$3, or what to do with the belt that a man hand tooled with Senator Douglas's name on it and sent to him as a gift. But he was steadfast in his belief that public service meant public sacrifice, not public enrichment.

Paul Simon, my other mentor in life, felt the same, followed in the Douglas tradition, and started me on a long road of disclosing in complete detail every year my income taxes and total net worth. There were painful moments early in my married life when Loretta and I had very little to claim as earthly possessions and filed a net worth which was pretty embarrassing. Things are a little better now, and I have continued the tradition.

But when Senator REID talks about changing the Senate rules, to start with, as the first item of business, I think what he is trying to do on behalf of Democrats and Republicans in this bipartisan bill is to address this fundamental issue of restoring the confidence of the public in the Senate. Before we roll up our sleeves and take on the issues that count for every family across America, let's take on the issue of restoring the integrity of the Senate. That is why this is a bill that is high on our list and the first we will consider.

The American people voted for change in this last election in many ways. They certainly want us to move forward. Some of our advisers tell us that the term "bipartisanship" has too many syllables and is unintelligible to the average person. I am not sure. But

people do understand the words "cooperation" and "compromise." And I think people across America said to us in the last election: We want you to compromise. We want you to find solutions. We do not want you to play to a draw with nothing to show for it.

The first issue that concerns the people of Illinois to whom I speak is this war in Iraq. In the first week of October, I went to Iraq with Senator JACK REED of Rhode Island. We visited Afghanistan and had three different stops in Iraq, and we spent many hours meeting with our soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen. I spent extra time with those from Illinois just to say hello to them and thank them. I came back not just with some frustration over a war which I think was a colossal, strategic mistake, but anger—anger that we continue to ask these brave young men and women to sacrifice their lives every single day.

I can recall when one of the generals took us aside and showed us one of these roadside bombs that kills and maims our troops, almost on a daily basis. It looked like nothing more than a fruit cocktail can, with both ends lopped off and a metal charge inside. They disguise it and camouflage it and put it on the side of the road. While unsuspecting American soldiers course down that road, they unleash the blast that kills or maims them. That is life for our soldiers in Iraq. They do not confront an enemy so much as confronting these improvised explosive devices.

Over the last few weeks, we have passed some tragic milestones. More Americans have died in Iraq than died on 9/11. As of the first of this year, the 3,000th American life was lost among our fighting men and women in Iraq. Over 22,000 have returned from Iraq with serious physical and mental injuries.

The legacy of this war will continue. Next week, the President is to propose the next phase of the war, what he wants to do next. I have to tell you, as one of 23 Members of this Senate who voted against this war, I continue to believe we made a serious mistake underestimating the gravity of the challenge once we had deposed Saddam Hussein. It is clear now this administration was not prepared to wage this war, certainly not prepared to move us to peace. What they have done is to move our troops into harm's way, risked their lives, and leave us in a situation, 4 years into this war—a war longer than World War II—where there is still no end in sight.

In October, our leaders in Iraq told Senator JACK REED and myself it is a matter of months. If we cannot get this under control in a matter of months, we have to be honest about it. I think honesty is important. There is a lot of talk about surge. Let's move beyond the word "surge" into the reality. We are talking about the lives of American soldiers, whether we will send 20,000 or 30,000 more American soldiers into that

field of combat, whether that can possibly make a difference.

I hope to God the President reconsiders that. I am afraid in many instances we are only sending targets and not troops. It is time for the Iraqis to stand up and defend their own country. It is time for them to accept the responsibility of governance and defense. We have given them so much, over 3,000 American lives and all of our treasure, so they can rebuild their country and have a chance. We deposed their dictator, put him to trial, saw his execution, gave them a chance for constitutions and governments, gave them all these opportunities, and now it is their turn. We cannot impose democracy on them. That appetite for democracy has to spring from their souls, and they have to want it badly enough to work out the political compromises to disband the militia, to show the kind of leadership which will give them a nation in fact rather than just in words. That will be one of the big issues we debate here.

Some have criticized us this week for not talking about Iraq enough. I can understand it. When I hear the mothers of fallen soldiers say that should be our first priority, I think they understand, as we do, there is nothing more important that ever happened in their lives. This assurance I can give: Next week, when this Senate convenes, both the Armed Services Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee will begin hearings on Iraq. The debate will really begin in earnest, as it should, as the American people expect. And we will have a responsibility to come up with the best answer for our Nation, for our troops.

There are so many other issues we face. One near and dear to my heart is the cost of college education. This young boy from East Saint Louis, IL, could never have attended Georgetown University or law school were it not for Government loans. I borrowed the money, paid it back, and believe it changed my life forever. So many students across America today wonder if they will ever be able to borrow enough to go to school. Some of them drop out because of debt. Some of them change their life plans because of paying off student debt.

Well, last year, we decided to make it more difficult. The President signed a bill raising the interest rates on student loans, making it more difficult for the kids of working families to go to school. One of our first priorities is to reduce the cost of college education expenses so young people with great dreams and limited means have a chance to succeed. That is one of our priorities as Democrats, and one I totally support.

I also think we have to restore some basic economic justice in America. How can you possibly explain that over 10 years we have not raised the Federal minimum wage? These people get up and go to work every day, many of them raising children, struggling to

survive, going to soup kitchens and pantries to supplement their income.

Over the Christmas holidays—as many of us do—I visited some of those places, and I met a lot of people who work 40 hours a week. They come to the soup kitchens, they come to the pantries because that is the one way to supplement their income. Well, we can do better. We need to increase the Federal minimum wage. And as Senator REID said, it is one of our highest priorities.

Senator MCCONNELL said, a few moments ago, when it comes to the Medicare prescription Part D program, he will not stand by and allow us to scrap the program. I say: Hear, hear. We do not want to scrap the program. It is long overdue. Prescription drugs under Medicare keep our seniors healthy, independent, and strong. But, sadly, we know the reality that when that bill was passed, it was written by the pharmaceutical industry. It took competition out of the program so they could charge higher prices. It created a maze of opportunities, but a maze of choices for many seniors who were bewildered by what to do. It created a doughnut hole, a period of time where seniors who were the sickest had no coverage whatsoever.

So I would say to my colleague on the other side of the aisle, we are not going to scrap it. We are going to do our best to improve it. And we can improve it, bring in some competition so we have reasonable cost drugs, so we have more coverage for seniors across America.

There is an old saying that there is no education in the second kick of a mule. No matter what side of the aisle we are on, there is a lesson for all of us. The American people have given us today a rare opportunity in our history. They have given us an order, too, to chart a better course for this Nation. They have asked us to listen. And if, at the end of the day, we play to a draw on these major issues—if we do not achieve results, if we do not show a good-faith effort toward compromise and cooperation—they will be just as harsh in their judgment 2 years from now as they were last November. And we deserve it.

As we begin anew this Congress, we need to resolve together, on a bipartisan basis, to find that path to a better and stronger America.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

IMPORTANT PRIORITIES

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I rise as well to speak about our priorities that Senator REID has introduced. First, I compliment him for his vision and drive toward shaping these priorities, and his leadership that will ensure the Senate makes the concerns of the average American family our top priority.

I thank my colleague from Illinois, Senator DURBIN, who, as always, is able

to articulate in a very smart way, but also a way the average person can understand, how important these priorities are to us.

I also, in advance, thank my colleague Senator MURRAY for being here, and who again, in her usual wise and thoughtful way, will help us let the American people know what our priorities are.

Now, I wore a blue suit today, naturally, because we are all excited over the election in November. But in our excitement, we have to remember that we are here because of the people who sent us here, and to realize their desire for change, to make their lives better. We know a bipartisan approach is the best and perhaps the only way we will get this done.

If all our exultation and happiness today—and, believe me, I stood there with pride watching the new Members in particular be sworn in, knowing how fine they are, what a diverse group of people they are—the thing they share in common is coming from the bosom of the people of their State. Each one, each of the new representatives, each of the new Senators represents the people of their State.

They come to us with a message, and I don't think the message is left, right, or center, as some of the pundits have said. The message is to keep your eyes focused on the average family. All too often we in Washington get lost in the world of Washington. Too often politics here seems to be a minuet, shadow boxing, sometimes real boxing, where each party and each individual is seeking advantage over the other, and the focus on getting something done—something done for the American people—gets lost.

If there was one message that this election had, I think that is it. The American people were pleading with us, crying out to us with a strong but plaintive voice: Help us. The world is changing, and we see that world change in every way. Technology has dramatically affected everything we do, whether it is terrorism, where technology has enabled small groups of bad people to hurt us; whether it is jobs in education, where we now have a one-world labor market, and our workers, our kids in the third grade are going to be competing not simply against the kids in the third grade across the hallway but the kids in the third grade in China, India, and Brazil; whether it is the technology that has allowed us to live longer.

I read somewhere that a little girl born today, if she lives in the early months and up to a year old, could well live to be 100. And not very unusually, that would almost be the average. That is incredible. What that means is new problems for Social Security and Medicare. It also means that our whole lifestyle changes as people get married later, have children later, and retire and have many years of leisure in life. So technology is changing everything.

The old messages—whether they be, in my judgment, the old Democratic

new deal message or the old Reagan Republican message—just don't work anymore. Voters, in November, didn't tell us to adopt a certain ideology or philosophy or even party. Their message to Washington was to stop fighting with each other and finally get something done for average Americans who are in more need of help now as the world changes quickly and dramatically.

The average American wants us to get to work on issues that matter to them on a daily basis: making them more secure, lifesaving medical research, fair wages, comprehensive immigration reform, energy independence, and affordable education and prescription drugs. They want us to go to work for them again. That is what we are going to do.

The 10 bills we have introduced are all aimed right at the heart of the average American in the sense of saying to the average American: We do know what you need, what you have asked us to do, and we are going to do our best to help you.

Make no mistake; overall, families are doing quite well, but they are beginning to hurt in certain ways: high gas prices, skyrocketing tuition, prescription drugs. These are all things the average person worries about that they probably didn't worry about 10 years ago. These first 10 bills that we are going to introduce represent the Democratic priorities for the Senate and the country. These bills take aim at making education and prescription drugs more affordable. They address our goals for energy independence, better homeland security, innovative medical research, a modernized military, and comprehensive immigration reform—priorities that have been neglected for far too long.

I first want to express my enthusiastic support for our bill to address college affordability, S. 7, which my colleagues will also address. We know we must make it easier for families to send their kids to college. As tuition costs rise, it gets harder and harder for them to do it. As college becomes more of a necessity, it also becomes less affordable. That is the dilemma we face. We are facing a critical time with this challenge coming, when a college education is vital not only to one's individual future but to our Nation's prosperity and independence.

We are competing now in a global market connected by technology, and we need a well-educated workforce. That is why I introduced upon arriving in the Senate a bill to permit a college tuition tax deduction. I have worked to support it ever since. We must ensure that this deduction does not expire, as it nearly did in December, by making it permanent. And we must do more. Just getting by is not enough when it comes to sending our kids to college. We must address other aspects of college costs, including Pell grants, loans, and lowering interest payments on loans. I know my colleague, Senator